

birds at the southern end of the island. A few had nests with eggs, some with small young.

Caspian Tern, *Hydroprogne caspia*.—A few pairs well spaced. Two pairs had runner chicks; one with a newly hatched young.

Roseate Tern, *Sterna dougallii*.—Small groups and odd pairs; some birds carrying fish; some courtship display observed.

Crested Tern, *Sterna bergii*.—A group of 20 pairs were just starting to nest on the beach near the settlement. About 700 pairs were nesting at the north end of the island—most nests contained one egg, a few with small young (P. Fuller).

Fairy Tern, *Sterna nereis*.—Small flocks were seen feeding offshore on the east side of the island. A group of 20 pairs were just starting to lay in scrapes in the coral; four nests were seen, three with one egg, one with two eggs.

Sooty Tern, *Sterna fuscata*.—Thousands of birds were nesting under the bushes in the settlement area. On October 26 eleven nests were found; however by October 30 eggs were everywhere. Nests were merely scrapes in the ground, often less than a metre apart. One egg in each nest. King Skinks ate many of the eggs. Birds were continually flying in from the north, particularly on the late afternoon of October 27 when thousands were moving in.

Bridled Tern, *Sterna anaethetus*.—A group of 30 birds were resting on the coral near the mangroves.

Common Noddy, *Anous stolidus*.—Large numbers were present, generally south of the Sooty Tern area. However some groups intruded well into the Sooty Tern colony, and a few Sooties nested right through the Noddy Terns' area also. Nest sites varied from scrapes in the ground, on the samphire, and on the top of bushes. The birds nesting in the samphire were packed close together; the others were much more spread out. Many birds were continually flying in with seaweed in their beaks to build onto their nests. No eggs were found until October 30 when 21 nests were seen, each containing one egg. Although the birds came in and out from all directions the largest concentrations were to the east. Masses of birds constantly moved in and out, sometimes settling on the water in rafts. Apart from a soft growling, grunting noise the birds were incredibly quiet.

Lesser Noddy, *Anous tenuirostris*.—Large numbers of birds were building nests in the mangroves. They started flying out early in the morning, flying southwards. They gradually reversed their flight at mid-afternoon, flying back to the mangroves. Most nests were almost complete, with many of the birds sitting on them ready to lay. Confiding and very quiet, their soft calls sounded more like small frogs than birds. This species, too, picked up weed from the beach, often scooping weed from the sea when in flight.

Welcome Swallow, *Hirundo neoxena*.—Pairs seen over most of the island.

Western Silvereye, *Zosterops gouldi*.—A very common bird all over the island, favouring the scrubs.

NOTES ON RAINBOW BIRDS AND FAIRY TERNS ON ROTTNEST ISLAND

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Rainbow Bird, *Merops ornatus*

On 9 December 1977 a pair of Rainbow Birds was first observed on Rottneest Island. The birds sat regularly on fence wires and in trees in the reforestation plot just east of lighthouse hill. They were seen on 14 December when we left the island, and were seen on the next visit

(23-28 December 1977). The birds were not seen on the next visit which began on 23 January 1978. We have no knowledge of whether the birds nested.

Rainbow Birds have apparently not been recorded on Rottnest before, because Storr (*Emu*, 64, 1965: 172-180) does not list them in his comprehensive review of the island's avifauna. Blæk has spent 149 days on Rottnest since August 1974; this is the first time Rainbow Birds have been seen by him on Rottnest. Rainbow Birds are scarce around Perth, sufficiently so for Serventy and Whittell (*Birds of Western Australia*, 1976) to list known local nesting localities. One pair turns up each October in the Tuart forest at Woodman Point, and probably nests there.

Fairy Tern, *Sterna nereis*

This species' habit of nesting on beaches and other areas without plant cover must entail considerable disturbance. In 1975 and 1977 we observed a breeding colony near Cape Vlamingh, Rottnest Island, adjacent to the main road. This area was not recorded as a breeding site by Storr (*Emu*, 64, 1964: 55-6). On 22 November 1975, the terns were first noted sitting in a group by the road. On 11 December, Blæk confirmed that nesting was in progress: equal numbers of one- and two-egg nests (five each) were counted on one small corner only (20%) of the total area, so as to avoid disturbance of the colony. By 18 December 1975 about ten birds were sitting, with many birds flying overhead. By 23 December 1975 the terns had abandoned the area. Even though December is one of the peak months for holiday activity on Rottnest, there was no sign of footprints or broken eggs.

The terns did not attempt to nest at this site in December 1976. However, in 1977 they were first noted at the same site on December 4, and on 12 December 1977 about 100 birds were nesting. This time we noted several Silver Gulls amongst the sitting terns. By December 23, the colony had been abandoned. We suppose that human disturbance caused the terns to leave the nests, allowing the gulls to eat the eggs.

BIRD NOTES FROM GREGORY SALT LAKE, GREAT SANDY DESERT, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Gregory Salt Lake is centred in 20° 10'S, 127° 30'E, about 70 km SSW of Billiluna homestead at the northeastern edge of the Great Sandy Desert. When full it is about 50 km long, 2.5 km wide and up to 10 m deep, making it the largest natural body of landlocked water in Western Australia.

It was discovered by A. C. Gregory in 1856 when he followed Sturt Creek southwestwards. He rode all the way around the lake to convince himself it did not drain eastwards, westwards or further southwards.

Carnegie (1898) visited the area in 1896 on his return journey to the Coolgardie goldfields from Halls Creek. The few people who have visited the lake since then have been mostly geologists and pastoralists.

Most visitors have been impressed by the variety and abundance of waterfowl on the lake but little precise data can be gleaned from their accounts. For example, Carnegie, who camped at the lake in April 1896, wrote "The lakes and creek abound in wild-fowl of all kinds . . . so dense was the crowd of shags, pelicans, snipe, small gulls, whistling duck, teal, and other birds, that to say there was aere upon aere of wild-fowl would not be wide of the mark . . .". Fisheries and Wildlife Warden McDonald (1969) found the lake full (48 km long and 25 km wide), bird life "most prolific", and Pink-cared Ducks present when he visited the lake early in 1969. However, the amount of water in the lake (and consequently the number of birds there) varies greatly. Carnegie saw it full about one